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City launches Caras Park river access project at Brennan's Wave

Enhancing accessibility and environmental sustainability in Caras Park

The City of Missoula is excited to announce the launch of the Caras Park river access project at Brennan's Wave, a key component of the North Riverside Parks and Trails Master Plan. The project is designed to improve accessibility, enhance viewing capacity, and promote environmental sustainability along the Clark Fork River. Construction begins Monday, September 23.

The project includes new ADA-accessible ramps leading from Ron's River Trail down to the water's edge. A new, expanded river overlook will increase viewing capacity and improve safety by adhering to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidelines. Terraced seating adjacent to Brennan's Wave will add viewing capacity and seating and help connect Caras Park to the river.

By creating stabilized river access points in Caras Park, the project will help eliminate user-made trails, reducing erosion and impacts on water quality. Adding sustainable native vegetation to the levee will help shade the riverbank, reducing increases in water temperature. These measures will help decrease negative impacts on aquatic life, including the federally endangered bull trout.

Construction is scheduled to begin on September 23 and continue through December, with completion expected in spring 2025, weather permitting. During this time, Ron's River Trail will be closed from Beartracks Bridge to the Carousel, including the overlook and access from Caras Park to Brennan's Wave. While no work will occur within the river and Brennan's Wave will remain open, river users are advised to exercise caution near construction areas.

Caras Park, including the lawn space, pavilion, amphitheater, and under-bridge playground, will remain open throughout construction. The "new park lot" will serve as a construction staging area, resulting in limited parking availability.

The $1.68 million project is primarily funded by a $1.2 million grant from the Economic Development Administration. Local matching funds are provided by the Missoula Redevelopment Agency, Missoula Downtown Foundation, 2018 Open Space Bond Funds and the Park District fund balance.

"The Caras Park river access project is a crucial step in our ongoing efforts to restore and enhance the urban riverfront," said Nathan McLeod, Parks and Recreation Associate Director for Planning, Design & Projects. "By providing hardened river access points, we're improving recreational opportunities and protecting the river ecosystem."

This initiative is part of the larger Clark Fork River Restoration and Access project, which seeks to restore riverbanks in downtown Missoula. Caras Park was identified as a primary location for providing reinforced river access due to its popularity for events and gatherings and proximity to Brennan's Wave, downtown amenities, and parks and trails.

For more information about the Caras Park river access project or the larger Clark Fork River restoration initiative, please visit https://www.engagemissoula.com/clark-fork-river-restoration-access-project.